

Isaiah 7:10-14 Dec.22, 2013 The Lord has given us a sign!

Kids what's this?  (Point to sign.) What does it mean? When can it help us? What if we didn't follow this sign in an *emergency*? (Danger.)

Signs are important. They tell us directions. It is very important that signs tell us clearly and easily what we need to know. Do each of you know what this sign  means? [Yes.]

But what if you can't read? Would you know what this sign means then? There are ways you might try to figure it out. You might look at the color of the sign. But there's a problem. The letters are red. What do red lights usually mean? So newer exit signs look like this.

It has the color that signals what? ["Go."]

It shows a person doing what? [Leaving the building.]

Does this do a good job giving you direction? Yes.



What does this sign mean? (Show picture of restroom sign, then the other.) Even someone who can't read can tell which restroom is for them. How? (The little pictures.) Now if someone sees this sign and ignores it, and walks into the wrong room, they can't complain: "I saw the sign, but I couldn't understand it." Why? Because it's obvious!

Think of a more serious situation. (Go back to the new exit sign.)



Say a fire breaks out. If a person ignores this sign, saying: "I'll follow my own way - I think I have a better way out than what the architect planned," they could end up very hurt. Their life is in grave danger.

In today's Bible reading we are jumping in on the Lord's conversation with a man named Ahaz. The Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah. The topic of a sign plays a prominent role. Let me give you some background on this.

Ahaz was king of Judah during a time when it seemed like almost everyone had turned their backs on God in exchange for false gods popular in that day. This must have made King Ahaz furious, to see this happening under his watch – right? Actually, no. King Ahaz was leading the charge away from the Lord. He set up altars to false gods all over Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 28). He wanted a connection with the supernatural, but he wanted to determine his own answers to just “who” God was. Ahaz and Judah reveled in false gods that allowed them freedom to indulge their senses in whatever they desired, and to call it “worship.”

In addition to that, this was a time of great upheaval for their national security. Enemies were teaming up to attack Jerusalem. And God cared very much about Judah and King Ahaz. He cared about each soul. He wouldn't let the house of David be wiped out. His promises of the Savior were at stake. So God sent Isaiah to King Ahaz with reassuring news. “Don't be afraid of these other nations that are gathering to overthrow Jerusalem (and wipe you out) – it won't happen – I won't allow it.” To confirm this, he said, “*Ask the Lord your God for a sign.*”

The Lord was offering: “Pick something miraculous, and I’ll do it. Then, when deliverance for Jerusalem comes, you’ll know it is I – the Lord – who has done it.”

But Ahaz didn’t want what the Lord offered. “I will not ask the Lord for a sign…”

Oh, he wanted help out of his problem - there’s no doubt about that. He had asked his false gods for help. He wanted help on his own terms, in his own way.

Look at the grace of our Lord! He had come to unbelieving King Ahaz with a promise of protection. He was giving yet another opportunity for Ahaz to come to his senses. He wanted Ahaz to have more than a short-lived political deliverance. He wanted him to know forgiveness of sins & eternal life. He wanted him to trust in the Lord’s promise that He would come to save us.

So he gave him a sign about more than earthly deliverance: *“the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son and call him Immanuel, which means ‘God with us.’”*

Wouldn’t hearing that just rock your world? God with us! Think about it! Wow. Think about everything it means, and the awe that would flood your mind! What? When?

But Ahaz - he ignored Isaiah’s words, ignored the Lord’s sign, rejected the Lord.

That makes me think of the leaders in Jerusalem of Jesus’ day. Oh, there was an external difference to Ahaz: they *thought* they had a connection with the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But their work-righteous teachings had covered up God’s truth. Their errors were leading them on a path toward hell. Jesus challenged their false teachings. He cared about their souls. He wanted them to come to their senses. In reply, more than once, they asked for a sign (Matt. 12:38, 16:1). “Ah, now we’ve got some leaders that are on the right track, asking for a sign.” No! Their words may have sounded like they were spoken out of care for God’s truth. In reality, they were stubbornly holding to their own teachings, in clear opposition to God.

Look at the grace of God! Jesus didn’t give in to their sinful show of religiousness. But he pointed them to the sign he would give them as ultimate evidence to believe in him, in this case: the sign of Jonah.

- Kids, who is Jonah? What happened to him? [Spent 3 days in the belly of a large fish, and lived to tell about it.] Can you name the time in Jesus’ life when he spent 3 days somewhere & then amazingly came out alive? The sign Jesus is talking about is His Resurrection.

Yes, fully knowing these leaders would call for his excruciating death, Jesus continued to point them to God’s rescue through him. He told them to look for the sign that would reveal just who He is. He wanted them to believe in Him and be saved, even after they rejected him to his death.

By God's grace: you have seen the truth - the good news of Easter. You have placed your hope in the Christ child, born to die – to conquer sin... and then to rise – the Conqueror of death.

And yet, how often do we find ourselves so wrapped up in the here and now - in the tinsel and the cheap ornaments of life - that we catch ourselves paying lip service to the Lord, while really blowing off what He has to say (about this or that aspect of our lives)?

Or maybe we catch ourselves affected by voices from the world which say, “Is the Bible really true? Is Jesus really God? Give us a sign. Then we'd believe.” That influence may subtly worm its way into you, and show its ugly head when you're struggling with a particularly difficult section of the Bible: “That doesn't make sense! Surely I'm not expected to believe that! If I just had more to go on - a sign that what God says is true.”

What is God's reply? God gives more than a sign to print on paper, post on a wall, or even as a symbol of his love. ... He gives himself. Flesh and blood evidence of his love. He came, just as He promised, to save us from our sins.

Immanuel - אֱמָנוּאֵל -- Ἐμμανουήλ -- *Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός* – *God with us*. Born of a virgin.

The depth, the breadth, the magnitude, the impact of this truth – the virgin birth of Jesus – cannot be understated.

I found a well-cited comment, which hits home at this point. Larry King, the well-known interviewer, once had the tables turned on him. He was being asked the questions. Asked, “if he could choose any one person in history to interview, who would it be?”, he replied: “It would be Jesus Christ.” And what question would Larry King ask Him? “I would like to ask him if he were really virgin born, because the answer to that question would explain history for me.”

Think about that comment for a moment.

It's true! The virgin birth stands out as a flashing sign to the world: look here! pay attention! For only the intervention of God Himself could cause such a thing to happen. You have a God who is unbound by the laws of nature. He who created the universe... the One who created time itself is able to step into time – in the flesh – in the way he has willed.

But why? The flashing sign of the virgin birth sparks the ultimate question. Why would God Himself step into our world? Into our very flesh? He did this to save you and me.

Believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, and everything else lines up:

- The fact that Jesus truly is “God with us!” And with that inseparably intertwined is the assurance...
- As True God, Jesus was without sin, from the 1st instant he spent inside his mother, Mary. He continued that to His final breath on this earth. He had to in order to save us.

- He had to be true God in order for his holy life, his suffering & his death, to count for every single person who has ever lived. Psalm 49 explains: *“No **man** can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is too costly, no payment is ever enough that he should live on forever. ... But **God** will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.”*

The fulfillment of the Lord's promise, given through Isaiah, recorded in ch.7 vs.14 of this Old Testament book... is History! God with us! God came to save us! That fact means everything for our future. Reject it like King Ahaz and the teachers of the law & Pharisees in Jesus' day ~ and hell yawns open at your feet. Believe it, and you are saved! Amen.